

The Land with no word for time

by

Lois Neely

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THERE USED TO be an Eskimo settlement at Kittigazuit but all that is there now is the broken shell of a Catalina flying boat that crashed on the beach 15 years ago. Out on the wingtip a hawk had built her nest, and three scrawny little beaks were reaching up to the mother as she circled anxiously, scolding us for trying to photograph her young.

The low hill beyond the beach was covered with the rosy bloom of fireweed. From the top of this rise we could look back across the Mackenzie Delta — here flat and tree-

less, a jigsaw pattern of grey-green land cut out by the shining mud-brown river.

All of the previous night we had threaded our way through these snaking delta lagoons, the midnight sun shining gloriously like midday. Now we were sailing north for the Beaufort Sea and the northern terminus of our journey to the land of the Midnight Sun.

The journey had begun seven days earlier at Hay River on Great Slave Lake, almost 1,200 miles to the south. There we had boarded the Norweta, a sturdy, 100-foot craft with accommodation for 12 passen-

THE LAND WITH NO WORD FOR TIME

Down north along the Mackenzie River
is Canada's new tourist frontier

BY LOIS NEELY



13921

wholesale prices for gorgeous objets d'art and jewelry, resplendent with emeralds, diamonds and sapphires.

This little town (22,000 population) is the largest jewelry-producing centre in Italy today. The jewelry still retains the old handicraft characteristics, and many Valenza artisans work in groups of three or four in the tradition of Renaissance craftsmen. There are also large, streamlined factories producing pieces ranging from bejeweled cufflinks and compacts to enameled cigarette cases trimmed with diamonds. And there's a jewelry school where you can watch students at work.

Best place to start is the permanent exhibition, the Mostra Permanente Oreficeria, which is that place where you will be divested of camera and bird-dogged around the showcases. It's for foreigners only, for the artists live in fear of copyists. In more than 200 cases, arranged by maker, you'll find everything from tiaras to tea services, tiepins and unisex pendants.

Valenza prices start at about \$15 — the sum quoted me for a turquoise-studded gold circle pin which the jeweler weighed in front of me on an ancient brass scale — and go from there to the moon. You would, for instance, need more than small change if thinking of acquiring the Tree of Life, a table sculpture made entirely of hand-carved yellow gold resting on a base of uncut amethyst crystals and studded with diamonds.

You can buy at the exhibition and there are English-speaking officials to help with export formalities. But you don't have to. You can instead make a mental note of the artists whose work you like, then go and visit them in the studios with which the streets of the town are lined.

One of the great Valenza jewelers is Carlo Barberis at 57 Viale Benvenuto Cellini. Tiffany buys from the Barberis collection. So does Van Cleef & Arpel, and Cartier's of London and Paris. When I called, Barberis and his son were in Switzerland with more than half the collection. The items left behind were enough to stock a topnotch store.

Best way to get to Valenza is by Alitalia jet to Milan or Genoa and thence by train (about a 90-minute ride). A bus met my train and everything in town was within easy walking distance.

The Smeraldo Hotel, Valenza's best, is pleasant, quiet and immaculate. Reservations are probably not necessary unless you go in January, April-May, July or September — busy seasons in the jewelry business when buyers from all over the world come here.

If you go off-season, you may be pampered. When I ordered roast quail for dinner, the waiter added a tiny lark / *continued on p. 33*

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gers — the only passenger vessel on the Mackenzie River. The trip was proving a leisurely one; we had stopped at every little Indian and Eskimo community along the way. And a luxurious one; a superb cuisine offered such fare as tournedos rossini and cherries jubilee, fresh fruit and vegetables daily, and a late-evening buffet. (When sunset slips directly into rosy sunrise and every bend of the river offers new beauty, who wants to go to bed?) And the free bar was open around the clock.

At Fort Providence we'd chatted with a little Indian couple both in their 70s who still live a good deal off the land. With bacon on a bare hook, Françoise jigs in the "snye", a narrow finger of river reaching inland behind their one-room cabin, and catches jackfish and grayling. John can still pick off duck on the wing with his rifle.

At Great Bear River, an Indian guide took us a few miles upstream by canoe to some of the finest grayling waters in the north. Fried lightly in butter, that grayling was the best meal of the trip.

Near the San Sault Rapids we went ashore at midnight to tour the Mountain River experimental pipeline project sponsored by the Northwest Study Group. The crew bosses came back to the ship for drinks and to rap about the problems of building a natural gas pipeline down the river valley.

At Fort Simpson, we swapped yarns with an old prospector, Albert Faille, who has made several trips into the Nahanni region with its fabled Headless Valley, the last when he was almost 80.

And at Arctic Red River, a cluster of weathered wooden houses and privies straggling up the bare hillside, we talked with young Ewan Hunter who had come from Scotland just two years ago and was in charge of the Hudson's Bay Post — the only white in this settlement of about 100 people. In his store Ewan offered pickled onions and Bromo Seltzer, pure wool tartan cloth and gaudy Hawaiian prints, gasoline pressure irons and fashionable doubleknit dresses, Arctic parkas and swimming trunks. "Does anyone up here really swim?" we asked. And we came across the answer at Aklavik — Corky, the Floating Swimming Pool, which is in fact an enclosed pool-on-a-barge that is towed to various communities throughout the summer so Eskimo and Indian children can join in the Red Cross learn-to-swim program.

Now, as we entered the ocean, the Norweta began to roll gently with the swell. Then we heard the captain's voice over the intercom: "Beluga whales on port side." It was a whole school of whales, for here the Mackenzie spills her wealth of fish into the ocean to create a rich feeding ground for the beluga. In vain we aimed our camera. There'd be a flash of white and then the

lovely creature would be lost again beneath the waves.

Twenty-five miles to the east we headed in for the harbor of Tuktoyaktuk. The tundra rolled back in gentle hills from the stony shoreline, with the occasional lonely tent pitched on a windswept spit of land and skeletal oil rigs rising gaunt against the sky. And, humping against the horizon, pingos — those gigantic frost boils where the permafrost has pushed up to form a turf-covered hill of solid blue ice perhaps 100 feet across and 40 feet high.

In Tuk, cab driver Eddie Gruben, an Eskimo capitalist, took us to



Tuktoyaktuk resident. Facing page: Mackenzie River ferryboat.

one of these pingos on the edge of town. There, hollowed out in the solid ice, was the community deep-freeze. We opened a door in the side of a hill and stepped into a 100-foot-long ice cavern, slipping and sliding along the glistening floor under dangling electric-light bulbs, picking our way between the stiffly frozen carcasses of dressed caribou.

There'd been a good run of caribou, we were told, and the men had taken off to follow the herd in their snowmobiles, their dogs riding on sleighs towed behind — an emergency measure in case of trouble. As one hunter put it: "If you get stranded out there, you can always

eat your dogs, but it's darn hard to digest a carburetor."

Along the beach we stopped to chat with an Eskimo sitting on the ground sharpening his harpoon, his face weathered to a rich walnut brown. On the racks by his prefab house fresh-caught beluga whale was drying, with chunks of blubber still on the bloody butchering block.

Over at the Catholic Mission, we clambered down into the hold of Our Lady of Lourdes, the little schooner which used to supply all the mission posts in the Western Arctic and which now serves as a hostel. The accommodation is pretty basic, but in a town lacking hotels it is at least a shelter from Arctic winds.

It is to Tuk that the Eskimos of Kittingazuit have come. Their children were brought here to school, and the adults followed. On the lawn beside his modern prefab bungalow, the young Californian schoolteacher was rebuilding an old whaling boat so he could join the men in their hunts. The Eskimos here put to sea in anything from a 30-foot inboard to a 19-foot freighter canoe with a 20-hp kicker.

The Fur Shop at Tuk produces some of the choicest parkas and mukluks in the Arctic. In the adjoining workroom we chatted with the Eskimo women who were deftly cutting and stitching the heavy skins.

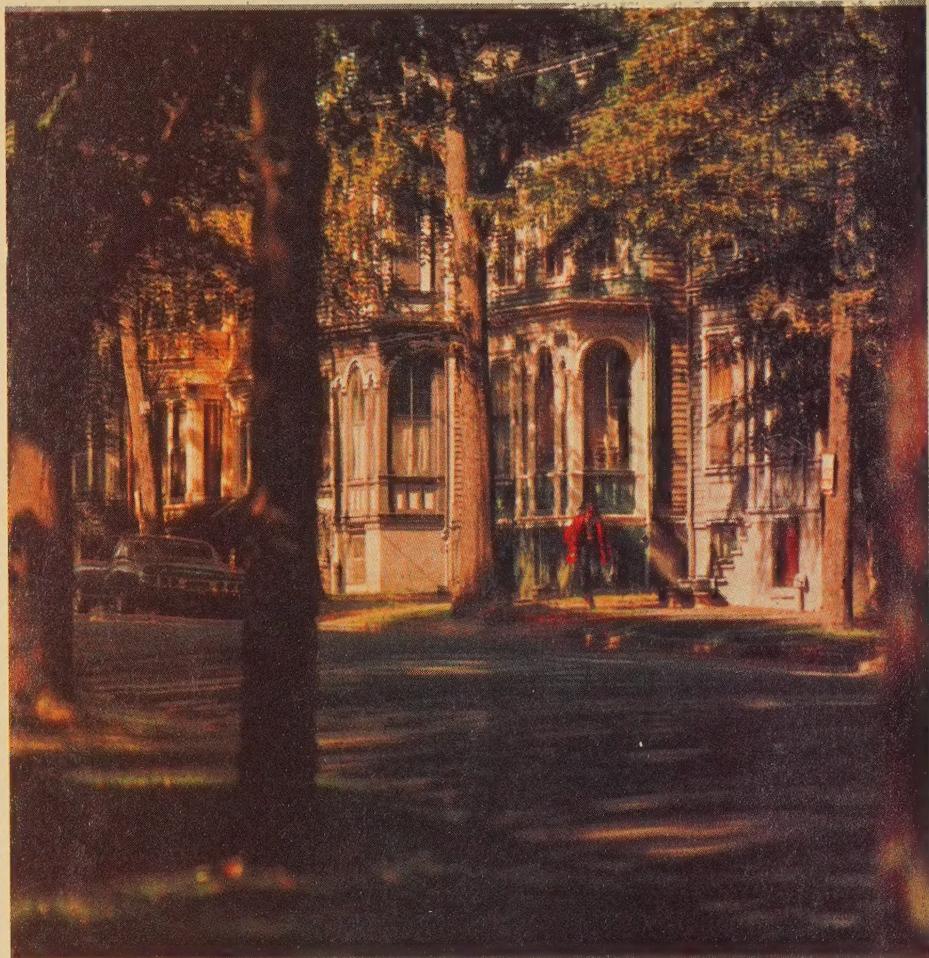
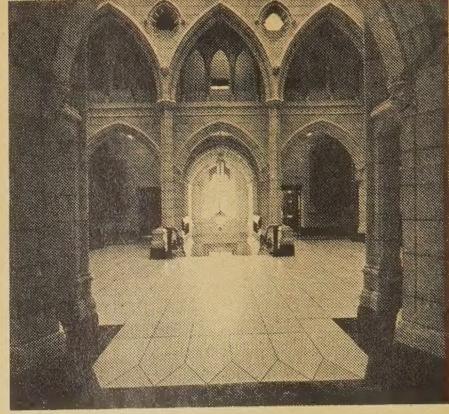
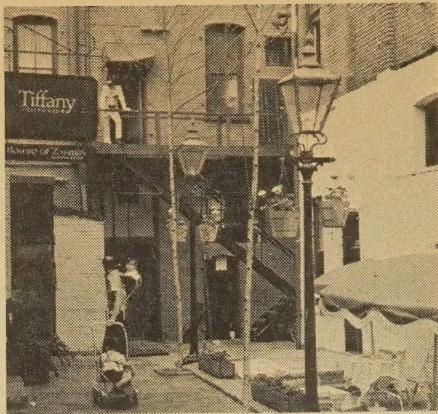
Over at the Igloo Inn Cafe, we cashed a cheque at the Commerce Bank's new sub-branch. The candy counter doubles as a teller's cage. A wall list prices ham and eggs at \$2.75, a quart of milk or a pound of butter each at \$1.40, ice cream fudgsicles at 40 cents. The young Eskimos are mad for ice cream. Outside the Hudson's Bay Post — a modern supermarket with a country-store atmosphere — every juvenile seemed to be enjoying an ice cream of some sort. Many of the little girls were dashing about in long summer calico parkas, with sneakers peaking out beneath.

The Eskimos have no word for "time". At half-past-one at night, with the sun a great golden orb circling the horizon, women were hanging out their washing and the streets rang with the shouts of children at play.

The Mackenzie River trip "down north" offers some magnificent scenery — purple hills and chalk cliffs, virgin forest and barren tundra, rapids and ramparts, and the unbelievably clear air of this last wilderness frontier. Starting in mid-June and running till late September when the weather is still warm, the company offers 14 trips a year — seven from Hay River north to Inuvik returning by jet to Edmonton, and seven in the reverse direction. The cost is \$985 from Edmonton for the seven-day cruise.

For details write Arctic Cruise Lines Ltd., Box 63, Hay River, N.W.T. □

Below: a quiet Halifax street.
Right: Vancouver's Gastown.
Far right: the Senate rotunda (where Victoria's "exiled" portrait hangs), Parliament Buildings, Ottawa.



A DAY ON MY TOWN

Three Canadian contributors plan your spare day in their home cities

VANCOUVER

The art of "not-see"

THE ART OF coming to grips with Vancouver in one day is less a matter of what you see than what you *don't* see. In fact, the secret is to carry the whole thing off without really "seeing" anything.

This simple theory of touring called "not-see", if practised with care, will provide you with a durable version of the Vancouver experience.

First, forget that you are a visitor. Ideally, you will adopt the persona of a resident indulging in a little creative slumming, moving through the day with an informed and plodding sort of sloth. Remember, above all, that you are not going anywhere to "see" anything; you are merely stepping out to "do" a few things.

This, hopefully, will safeguard you from the tourist-as-witness syndrome, the state in which the eyes are used like a camera full of endless film.

After breakfast — no later than 9.00 am — we'll take a walk along the sea wall in Stanley Park — on the south side facing English Bay. Keep in mind that you are not here to "see" the park, the birds, or the Bay. You are merely walking down breakfast. Assume only a vague interest in your surroundings.

Now you are moving into a state of mind most conducive to feeling out the city. Stanley Park is an excellent place to begin. The monotonous slop of water across the bright shingle of log-littered beach is a reminder of Vancouver, the mythical woman, touched by the moon and measuring her days in the ebb and the flood of tides. Here and there out on the Bay demurred freighters ride at anchor like rejected lovers.

It's now about 10.45 and breakfast has fully settled. We'll drive over the Burrard Bridge, and into Kitsilano for a mid-morning coffee in the cafeteria of the MacMillan Planetarium. Again, we're merely here to lurk about the edges of visual possibilities. We shall sit before a large window looking over the mouth of False Creek into the white clusters of the West End apartments. In the foreground, a steady parade of tugs worries to and fro, towing log booms and rafts. Far out on English Bay, there's a billowing sailcloth in the morning sunshine.

Casually, and with no marked intent, we'll now stroll through the adjacent Museum of Natural History which has, among its numerous displays, a disarmingly ingenuous presentation of the history of Vancouver. We shall gaze at random at the exhibits, using them mostly as conversation pieces. Do not fill your mind with facts. Impressions will stay with you far longer.

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